

End Of The Line

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by Kyle Eggleston

Commander Bert McDuff looked at the clock in his room at the rehabilitation center on Mars. He had been in the center for six months now, it was typical of those who had stayed that long to be released. Bert hadn't heard of any release date for him yet. He found it rather odd that he had been there so long and hadn't heard of any kind of status update. It wasn't his fault, he had been the model patient. At least to his own thoughts he had been, some might say otherwise. But that was their own thought process that allowed that. He knew he had been quite a good patient. Bert had followed all of the procedures laid out for him, followed the treatment plants. He felt, in his mind's eye, that he was cured of his illness.

Bert wondered what his ship, The Fearless, had been up to without him. He had heard rumors they were exploring the outermost Rim. But those were just rumors. People knew if you went too far out on the Rim, you'd go mad; insane as it were. Not many people who had been known to go out to the Rim came back alive to tell the tales of what they learned. Bert hoped his ship hadn't headed out that far, it was dangerous.

His door opened, the group coordinator entered. "Group time Mr. McDuff." She said in a cheerful, happy tone. It was annoying, but she was just doing her job. He was sure she wanted to be doing anything but being there. Rumor had it she had been forced to work there as a volunteer position to pay off some debt to society. Bert had heard a lot of rumors during his time at the rehab colony. She turned to walk away.

Bert followed the woman out of his room and down the hallway to where the group would be meeting. He wondered what they would want to talk about today. Probably the same things they always wanted to talk about every day since he had been there. How would he want to improve the life he was leading or some other damned thing. It was always the same.

The meeting room was full of the usual suspects. Bert walked in quietly as to not disturb them. If he made any quick movements, some would get in his face. He didn't feel like any confrontations today. He found a chair and sat down a little out of the way of anyone. This is how Bert managed to keep his nose clean while he was in rehab. It had worked so far, why mess with a good thing?

"Alright group." The woman said. "We have a few new faces here today, so let me introduce myself. My name is Amanda." She smiled at the group. Most of the people didn't

care one way or the other. They just wanted to do their time and get out of there. Others, like Bert, were considerate and listened to what Amanda had to say.

“I want to congratulate you on the steps you are making to get clean and become a productive member of society again.” Amanda said. “As you know, this is the end of the line. Anything after this would require a Mind Frag, and we don’t want that happening now do we?” She paused. “No, we don’t.”

A newcomer raised his hand. “Um, Amanda? What is a Mind Frag, if I may ask?”

The room went silent. Most people knew what a Mind Frag was. There were very few who didn’t know or didn’t want to know. It was after all the most humane way of wiping someone’s memory and allowing them to begin fresh again.

Amanda shifted in her seat uncomfortably. She was not in favor of Mind Frags, having seen what they do to a person up close and personal. Her husband had undergone the procedure, he came out a completely changed individual. For the better? Sure. But also for the worst. She wouldn’t wish it on her worst enemy.

“The easiest explanation of it is forced rehabilitation.” Amanda explained. “It’s reserved for the worst of the worst, those who don’t want to get better. So it’s forced upon them.” She shuddered at the memories of her husband and how he changed. “They say it’s humane, but I have my doubts about it.” She stopped herself before going any further into it. Amanda couldn’t afford to let her emotions get in the way of her job.

“Anyway, where was I?” She asked. “Oh yes, welcome to the new comers. You’re doing the right thing by being here. Um, does anyone wish to share how their week went?” She looked around hopeful for a volunteer or two.

Bert cleared his throat. “Yeah doc, I guess I can go.”

Amanda smiled at Bert. “Go ahead.” She said.

“Well this week I was reminded of how fragile life is.” Bert said. “You see, my uncle died in a house fire on Earth. I don’t know what happened to the fire suppression system that was supposed to take over in such an emergency. I guess it failed to do its job. Well I lost my uncle because of this. So I’ve decided to take the opportunity whenever I can to be thankful for those around me, like you lot. When I came in here I was a mess, but thanks to you all I’m becoming a better person, so thank you.” He tried to smile as best he could. The memory of his uncle came flooding in and tears began to form in his eyes. “Thank you.” He said.

Amanda smiled at Bert. She knew his story and the progress he was making. She was proud of him and his accomplishments. “Thank you for sharing Bert.” Amanda looked around to the rest of the group, anyone else wish to share?” She asked hopefully.

No one else raised their hand. This was typical for a group. No one ever wanted to share. Amanda had grown used to the silence. She hoped that someone else would want to share, maybe even one of the newcomers. She continued to smile.

“That’s okay.” Amanda said. “There’s always next week.” She started wrapping up the session when a woman’s hand went up.

“I...” The woman stammered. “Would like to say something.”

Bert looked up from the floor to see who was speaking. His mouth dropped open as he saw who it was, or who he thought it was rather. The woman reminded him of an ensign on the Fearless. He couldn’t remember her name though. There were so many of the lower decks that he didn’t know. As a commanding officer he was too busy to hold hands with all of his crew, maybe it was time for that to change.

“Go ahead.” Amanda smiled at the young woman.

“My name is Susan. Susan Talbot.” She said. “I served on the U.S.S. Fearless for like a year before I ended up here. There is some scary shit out there on the Rim.” She said, her hands were shaking as she spoke. Susan remembered everything she had experienced, and was now reliving those events. It was something she wished she didn’t have to experience, but here she was experiencing it. “They say there are ghosts on the Rim, well they’re wrong. They’re more like monsters.”

Susan continued to talk for what seemed like hours. Everyone watched with horror as she described the awful things she lived through out there in the dead of space. There were horror stories, and then there were experiences that she had witnessed. Bert wished he could hug the woman and tell her it was going to be okay. But something told him a hug wouldn’t help.

“If I don’t get better here,” Susan said “A Mind Frag is what I’ll be looking forward to. I don’t want that to happen. I don’t want to lose the person I’ve become. The person I am today.”

After Susan was done talking, the room was dead silent. You could hear a pin drop and it would echo throughout the room. Even Amanda didn’t know what to say after that. She had to say something to bring the group back to focus but was at a loss of words.

Bert could tell Amanda had lost control of the room, and rightly so. He spoke up. “Thank you for sharing ensign.” He said.

Susan looked at Bert and frowned. “Why didn’t you protect us commander? Why weren’t you there to protect your crew?” She lunged at him. Two orderlies had to restrain her and take her back to her room for her to calm down. The room cleared leaving Bert and Amanda all alone.

“You were her commanding officer.” Amanda said putting the puzzle pieces together.

Bert nodded. “Yes for a short time I was. I had heard rumors that my ship was headed out to the Rim, but I didn’t believe it. Guess I should have accepted it at face value.” He stood from his chair and paced around the room. His shoes made a squeaking sound on the freshly polished floor.

Amanda leaned forward in her chair and tried to catch Bert’s gaze. It was difficult to do as he kept changing positions as he walked. His eyes never meeting hers. “Bert, commander,” she said “It’s not your fault. What happened to the Fearless is not your fault. I didn’t know a member of your crew would have been here today. If I had known, I would have warned you before coming to group. I’m sorry, I failed you.”

Bert stopped pacing just long enough to look into Amanda’s green eyes. There was nothing she could have done to prevent any of it. Sure she could have told Bert not to show up to group that day, but it would have just postponed the inevitable. The ensign would have found him in a corridor later on eventually.

One thing the ensign said bothered him. Why didn’t he protect them, why didn’t he protect his crew? What could he have done from his hospital room. Nothing. But he could have warned the Fearless not to go out to the Rim. Every fleet commanding officer knew the Rim was dangerous. Anyone looking to go there willingly was looking for a one way mission. The Fearless was lucky to have made it back, assuming she did make it back in one piece. He wanted to find out, but knew speaking with the ensign would only stir up more trouble. Trouble he didn’t want to deal with. But sometimes you had to deal with trouble in order to get answers.

Amanda broke the staring contest as it was making her uncomfortable. Standing up from her chair, she decided to visit Susan and see if there was anything she could do to help her adjust to her new living situation. Crossing the room, her heels made a sharp sound on the tile. Reaching the door, she turned to face Bert once more.

“You did nothing wrong commander.” She said trying to reassure him. “You weren’t in command of the Fearless when she went out to the Rim.” Amanda turned around and left the room leaving Bert alone to think over this thoughts and feelings he was having.

Bert walked over to a window. He could see the Martian landscape from there. Construction crews were building a new dome, probably an addition to the rehabilitation center. He couldn’t tell for sure as it was over a mile away. Bert didn’t know how vast the center was, he knew it was big just not *how* big.

Leaving the room he walked down a corridor that would take him to his sleeping quarters. The word quarters was a bit elaborate for the room he was staying in. It was a simple room with a single bed in it. There wasn’t anything fancy to the place, nothing like he was

used to aboard a star ship. Even though, it managed to serve its purpose well. He slept just fine there ever since his first day at the center. But sleep wasn't his problem now was it? No, Bert's main problem were his waking monsters that visited him while he was alert. Those were the things he had been learning to control over the course of his stay on Mars. He hoped to get out of there soon and back among the stars where he belonged.

There were many things Bert wished would happen. Being back in command of his ship was his chief goal. Apologizing to those he had wronged over the course of his service was another thing he needed to take care of. Apologizing for your wrong actions was never an easy thing to do, it took a brave man to face those wrongs and try to make them right. It could be argued that Bert was a changed man after his stay at the rehabilitation center. Not everyone would see it as that, but those who knew him would and that's what was most important.

Entering his room, Bert noticed his communications display was flashing green. He had missed a message from someone. Walking over to the device, he activated it.

Doctor Matt Allen of Crimson Gamma appeared on the screen.

"Commander McDuff." Matt began. "Bert." He smiled. "I know it's been a while since we last talked in that brig cell on the station. I wanted to catch up with you and see how you are doing. I hope all is well and you're receiving the help you need. I'll be in touch. If you get this message before I contact you again, feel free to give me a call. I'd love to catch up. Allen out."

The message playback ended.

Bert smiled. It was good of the doctor, his friend, to contact him. He wondered why he hadn't made contact sooner than he did. Bert was sure Matt had his reasons for not contacting him. Life got busy on the station, he was sure of it. At least he had one friend in the universe who wanted to hear from him.

The rest of the day passed without incident. Bert didn't run into anymore crew members from the Fearless, it would seem Susan was the only one who was in rehabilitation with him and she was being taken care of in another part of the facility. Bert was glad she was getting the help she needed. If she had been out on the Rim as she said, she was going to need all of the help the doctors could offer her.

Yawning, Bert felt rather sleepy and tired. He laid down on the bed to take a quick nap. There were no other meetings he had to be at that day, and lunch wouldn't be served for another four hours. Closing his eyes, he hoped to dream of peaceful things like puppy dogs and ice cream. He was quite fond of both. Before long he was fast asleep.

Bert dreamed he was on the bridge of his ship, the U.S.S. Fearless. A Red Alert sounded from behind. He was in the heat of battle. The enemy was unknown to him, all he knew is he

had to continue firing the main battery. The enemy had to be stopped at all costs. Commander McDuff grasped the armrests of his command chair. With every blow, he came that much closer to falling out of his chair and onto the deck.

“Report!” Bert yelled.

“Shields are failing sir.” A young ensign yelled back over the noise of destruction. “The enemy ship is closing, readying their main battery. They’re preparing to fire.” The ensign braced for impact as another barrage of weapons fire hit the Fearless.

Sparks flew across the bridge as it was engulfed in flames. Bert was surrounded by fire. Everywhere he looked there were dead officers. There was nothing he could do but order to evacuate the ship. If there were any survivors that is.

A communications channel opened up. The main viewer came to life. Captain Jack O’Brien stood on the bridge of his ship unscathed from the attack Commander McDuff had given them. “This is Captain Jack O’Brien of the United Earth Force Alliance, the real one. You are under orders to surrender. Abandon your ship, you’ve lost.”

Bert shook his head. “Negative captain.” He said. “I still have weapons and my shields will repair themselves shortly. It is you who will surrender. Prepare to be boarded.” Bert ran to the weapons console and fired off a barrage of gunfire at the enemy ship. It barely made a dent in their shields.

O’Brien sighed. The man really was going to go out with a fight. Very well, he thought, if that’s the way he wants to do things; so be it. “Helm come about, three four six mark two. Weapons arm all forward batteries, give them everything you’ve got. Fire!”

The Fearless exploded leaving nothing behind. Bert McDuff found himself floating weightless in space gasping for air. He was grabbed by a tractor web from the enemy ship.

Commander McDuff woke in a cold sweat. *That damned dream again.* He thought. It had been years since the Civil War, it was over. Yet he still dreamed about fighting to the death for some unknown reason. His enemy was always Captain O’Brien. Bert had nothing against O’Brien that he knew of. The man was an upstanding officer full of confidence and courage, everything Bert admired in an officer of the line. So why was he having these dreams now? There seemed to be no point to any of them.

Bert’s comm channel flashed green again. Sitting up, he called out to the computer. “Decode message.” The computer beeped in response.

“Hello? Can you hear me? Is this thing working?” The voice of Ensign Susan Talbot came over the comm line.

Bert was confused why the ensign was contacting him, or how she was contacting him. He figured she was in some solitary type setting without the ability to contact out until she cooled her heels. Still he wasn't about to leave her hanging without someone to talk to.

"Yeah I can hear you ensign." Bert said. "This is Commander McDuff. How are you contacting me?"

Ensign Talbot snickered at her success. "It worked!" She exclaimed. "I don't now how, but it worked! This is great! Commander am I glad to hear you. Listen, I've been trying to reach you for weeks now. I finally managed to unlock whatever program you've been locked into for the past six months."

Bert shook his head. What was she talking about? It wasn't making any sense to him. "Program? What program are you talking about ensign? We're here on Mars. There isn't a program running. We are here on Mars."

The ensign sighed. "No sir, we're not." She said plainly. "You are being held captive. We are nowhere near Mars sir. We're out on the Rim, the edge of known space." Susan tried to remain calm, there was so much information she needed to convey to the commander, but she didn't have the time to do so effectively.

Bert shook his head again. None of this was making sense. He tried to remember where he was. As far as he knew, he was on Mars at the Rehabilitation Center. He had been there for the past six months after his outburst on Crimson Gamma, Doctor Allen convinced him he had a serious problem that needed to be taken care of. He took leave and checked into the rehabilitation center on Mars. Yes that was right, that's how he remembered it.

The ensign felt sorry for the commander. He wasn't remembering events clearly or correctly. "No sir." She said. "We were heading for Mars when we were attacked by an alien force. They took control of our ship, forcing us to take shelter in a nebula to make repairs. The ship found us and continued their attack." She said. "Does any of this ring a bell?"

Bert was confused. How could he be somewhere where he wasn't? It wasn't making sense to him. *No, the ensign must be confused.* He thought. Bert was certain he was remembering events correctly. He returned to the Sol System in order to get the help he needed. He wasn't in some alien holding cell or prison, that was absurd.

"I know what you're thinking." The ensign said. "The doc said this might happen. We've all been trying to contact you. This is the first time one of us has made it through." She paused trying to decide what to tell her commanding officer next. "We were boarded, the ship was taken over by an alien force. They set a course for the Rim and stranded us out here. They must have a base out here, I think that's where we are."

Bert shook his head. "No no no, ensign you must be mistaken." He tried to have it make some kind of sense in his mind. After the display the ensign put on during the group counseling session, she must be under some kind of duress or stress or...something. Yeah that's gotta be it, Bert thought.

"I've got to close this channel." Susan said. "Someone's coming. I'll try and speak with you later again sir." Her voice sounded hurried. "It was good to hear your voice again sir, I thought we lost you." The channel closed.

Bert sat on the edge of his bed. He tried to keep his mind from going into overload. If what he was being told by the ensign was the truth, then the past six months had been a sham. He looked around the room, it seemed normal. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary, it was the same room he had been in for the past six months. Physically, nothing had changed.

A bell sounded in the hallway letting the patients know it was lunch time. Bert stood from his bed and headed out to the corridor that would take him to the main eating area. As he walked he thought he heard people whispering about him. Whispering his name and saying things about him and his crew. He shrugged it off claiming it was just fatigue, nothing a good nights rest would take care of.

Entering the cafeteria, Bert grabbed a tray of food and some eating utensils. Like usual, he found an empty table and sat down. Bert liked to eat alone, he preferred to be with his own thoughts than trying to come up with answers for a conversation that he had no interest being in.

As he sat there eating, he saw Susan enter the cafeteria. She was escorted by two orderlies one on each side of her. She picked up a salad and a plastic fork. Making eye contact with Bert, she smiled and gave a slight wave. Bert refused waving back to her. She had tried to attack him earlier in group, that's just something you don't forget.

Susan walked towards Bert's table. He frowned. *Just keep walking. Just keep walking. Just keep walking.* He repeated over and over to himself. As luck would have it, she sat down across from him. The orderlies looked at each other and stood behind her.

"Oh I'll be fine boys." Susan said to the orderlies. "I promise I won't get too rough with the commander, I've learned my lesson."

The orderlies again looked at each other. One of them spoke. "Don't try any funny stuff, we'll be over there watching." They took leave of her and stood near the cafeteria door.

Susan took a bite of her salad and frowned. It wasn't as crisp as she liked it. Then again this was a simulation, the aliens couldn't get everything right from her memories; could they? She figured it best not to try and find out.

“Hey, sorry about earlier commander. I had to make sure it was you.” The ensign said referring to trying to attack Bert in the group session. “The aliens sure did do a good job at recreating this place from our memories. Well from mine at least, I don’t know if you’ve ever been here before. In real life I mean.” She took another bite of her salad, this time eating a black olive.

Bert took a bite of his own slop that was before him. He wasn’t sure what it was, but it sure as hell didn’t taste like chicken. He pushed the tray away from him, Bert just wasn’t hungry at that moment in time.

“You’d better eat sir.” Susan said. “You want to keep your strength up.”

Bert leaned forward and whispered just in case the ensign was right, and there were aliens watching their every move. “If this is all fake, as you say ensign, a simulation as it were. Then this food isn’t real.”

Susan nibbled on a piece of cheese. “Oh the food is real sir. They usually want us to have strength to endure our interrogation sessions. Those usually happen when we’re asleep. Our minds try and come up with scenarios to keep us sane in the form of dreams.” She thought about the last dream she had, it had to do with being in a large open field full of flowers. It was so peaceful, Susan hadn’t wanted to leave. But she knew it was just a dream protecting her from the pain she was being put through.

“The more intense the dream, the harder they’re invading your memories looking for information.” Susan explained. “At least that’s my theory. From what I hear some of the dreams the higher line officers have are just down right nightmares.”

Bert nodded in confirmation. “I can attest to that.” He said remembering the dream of his ship in flames and being destroyed by an enemy during the Civil War. Things were beginning to make sense now, at least some of it. He wondered if they could figure out a way to get the hell out of this place, wherever they were.

“You say we’re out on the Rim?” Bert asked.

Susan nodded. “Yeah, I overheard one of the guards talking. Orderlies.” She corrected herself. “They thought I was asleep and were talking about what they were going to do with me.” She paused, took a quick look around for a moment and then focused back on Bert. “I have a plan. If we can destroy the dome supporting us, this simulation might end, we should regain consciousness of where we really are behind held. We might have a fighting chance then.”

“Might?” Bert was skeptical. “You don’t know for sure if this plan of yours will work ensign. You just have a hunch.” He took another look at his food, he knew he needed to eat it. Strength was important. Pulling it back towards him, Bert took another bite. It was awful.

“That’s right sir.” The ensign said. “I don’t know for certain if that will work. I only have a theory. A theory approved by the first officer. We didn’t know where you were, so she’s been trying to make a plan of attack to get out of here.”

Finishing her salad, Susan shrugged. “You can either try and escape this hell hole, or not sir. It’s up to you. I for one say we give it a go.”

“The first officer, I want to speak with her.” Bert ordered.

Susan nodded. “I’ll try and see if I can get you in contact with Lieutenant Commander Metcalf. Just sit tight.” She stood from the table and walked towards the door where the orderlies were standing.

“Take me back to my cell.” She said smirking at the thought. The orderlies took her out of the cafeteria and back down the corridor.

Bert took another bite of his slop. Why did the ensign get an appetizing salad, and he got whatever this was? It didn’t make sense to him. The aliens sure got the Martian landscape right. He had only been to Mars a handful of times, but each time he marveled at the view. It was something unique to behold. Bert wondered how the ensign planned on blowing the atmospheric dome above them. That would take some explosives of some kind, something they *didn’t* have readily available.

As Bert finished his lunch, he too stood up and walked towards the door. He was greeted by Amanda. “Sir, I understand you wanted to speak with me.”

Bert looked at Amanda confused. Why was she addressing him as sir? She was a civilian, well as far as he knew she was a civilian. He went to walk past her ignoring the question when she blocked his path, stopping him.

“I think it’s best if we took a walk sir.” Amanda said. She gestured to the open corridor before them.

Bert smiled slightly. “Alright Amanda, if you say so.” They walked down the corridor side by side.

“It’s me, Lieutenant Commander Metcalf.” Amanda said. “Act natural, they don’t know I tapped into this part of the program.” She held a clipboard in her hands and pretended to refer to it as they walked, making it appear like a routine doctor/patient conversation.

Bert was confused but went along with it. He had nothing else to lose at this juncture. When he woke up this morning he thought he was on Mars. By the afternoon he found out he was someplace entirely different. A far off place, some space station or ship out on the Rim. It was confusing to say the least.

"Lieutenant Commander, what the hell are we doing here?" Bert asked assuming he wasn't being lied to. "I've been racking my brain trying to remember events as they unfolded. I remember heading home to take care of my mental state. I don't remember being in a dogfight with aliens, I don't remember being boarded, and yet here you are telling me otherwise."

Metcalf nodded. "I understand sir. They hit the command staff harder than the rest of the crew as we're more valuable to them. The lower decks don't know shit, and the aliens know that. We're the ones with the command codes and the defensive abilities of Earth. That's the information they're after." She ticked off a checkbox on her clipboard and pretended to write something down.

Bert rubbed his hands together, he was cold. "So that's what they're after. Earth's defenses." It made sense, if you take down Earth you basically take down the rest of the fleet. What better way to invade a world than from within. "But who are they?"

Metcalf shook her head. "I don't know sir. They haven't shown themselves to me yet. I get glimpses and flashes of the aliens, but nothing concrete." She paused. It was difficult to explain. Metcalf had been under a lot of stress over the past six months. Believing your commanding officer was dead took its toll on her. She hated it, but was happy to hear that Commander McDuff was indeed alive, it gave her a fighting chance to get the hell out of there to escape.

Metcalf looked up quickly. "They're tracing this signal." She said. "I better go. I'll try and contact you later." The holographic image of Amanda disappeared and was replaced by an identical copy.

Amanda looked to Bert confused. "I'm sorry Bert, you were saying?"

Bert smiled realizing what had just happened. Metcalf's fake had been swapped out for the original program. Very clever. "Oh, I was just saying how great it will be to get back to Earth once my treatment is over." Bert said. It was a good thing he was quick on his feet. He didn't want the aliens to know he was onto them now. "If you'll excuse me, I think I'm going to go lay down and take a nap. I'm a little tired."

Amanda smiled. "Of course. Sleep well."

Bert turned and headed towards his room. Upon arriving to his room, Bert laid down on his bed. He really didn't want to sleep but wanted to find out if what the ensign said about the dreams was true. The only way to do that was to actually fall asleep and see what happened.

Closing his eyes, he waited to fall asleep. It took a few minutes, but eventually he did fall asleep and entered a lucid dream state.

Bert stood on the bridge of the Fearless. Again he was in the midst of battle with the enemy. On the main viewer stood Captain Jack O'Brien as big as life.

"Fearless, you are ordered to surrender." O'Brien ordered.

Bert's instincts were to refuse the order. Which he almost did, but then a thought occurred to him. What if he refused his refusal? What if he gave in to the captain and his demands. Bert decided to try just that.

"Commander McDuff to enemy vessel, Captain O'Brien I am ready to surrender my ship to you. Give me a moment to prepare my crew."

O'Brien looked shocked. "Understood Fearless. Weapons hold. Let the man do what he needs to do." The screen went blank.

Lieutenant Commander Metcalf came and stood by Commander McDuff. "Sir, I believe we can force our way into their computer system through a back door Trojan virus. I just need your command codes to input into the computer. Then I can release the virus."

Bert looked to the lieutenant commander. He had to remind himself this was not real, it was a dream. The real Metcalf wouldn't request his command codes, she would allow him to make the entry into the computer system himself. *The aliens must be getting desperate.* Bert thought. Their attempts so far had failed, why not try something new. It's what he would do if he were searching someone's mind for command codes.

Commander McDuff walked to his command chair and sat down. Pulling up his command console, he entered in a sequence of commands. This allowed him to take command of navigation and helm from his command station. Setting a course for the enemy ship, he smiled. "Ramming speed."

As the ship got closer, Metcalf reacted in surprise. "This is your plan commander?" She asked.

Bert nodded. "Yes it is."

"Their shields are up." She protested. "If we don't lower them, or deactivate them somehow, we'll be vaporized."

Bert nodded. "Yes I know. Carry on." He said. The enemy ship was getting bigger on the main viewer.

"This is suicide!" Metcalf yelled. "Commander, you've lost it. With all due respect."

"I have, haven't I." Bert agreed. "If you can't beat them, join them lieutenant commander. We are joining them."

The two ships collided in a giant explosion. There was nothing left to recover, nothing left to rescue.

Bert woke up in a scientists laboratory. He was laying on some kind of operating table attached to several machines via long tubes. Removing one of the tubes attached to his head, he looked to his left. There was Lieutenant Commander Metcalf. She too was hooked up to several machines.

“He’s awake.” A man’s voice could be heard coming from the dark.

“Sedate him, quickly!” A female scientist said.

Bert fought the drugs as best he could, but failed to do so. He fell back asleep.

Another man entered the room. He was not amused by the progress of his scientists. Speaking to them, he frowned. “I thought you said you would have this situation under control.” He said. “I have obviously misplaced my trust in you. I am putting an end to this operation.”

“But sir,” The female said. “Please, let us continue.”

The man shook his head. “No. Mind Frag them now. It’s over. Put them back on their ship and send them home. They won’t know any better what has happened here. We will try this another way.” He left the room in anger.

The male scientist looked at the female scientist in disbelief. “He can’t be serious!” He exclaimed.

The female scientist folded her arms. “He’s the leader of our people, Ketish can do anything he wants to do, and he just did. Follow out the order. Mind Frag them. Send them on their way.”

Ketish stormed down the hallway as an aide came to his side. “Your orders sir?” The aide asked.

“Take me back to Dubor.” Ketish commanded. “Get me out of here. We have failed.”

The End